ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT—21 FEBRUARY 2013

Lok Sabha	—	**Fifteenth Lok Sabha**
Session	—	**First Session of the Year**
President of India	—	**Shri Pranab Mukherjee**
Vice-President of India	—	**Mohammad Hamid Ansari**
Prime Minister of India	—	**Dr. Manmohan Singh**
Speaker, Lok Sabha	—	**Smt. Meira Kumar**

HONOURABLE MEMBERS,

I welcome you to this session as I address this joint sitting of the two Houses for the first time as President. I hope this session will be productive and useful.

As I speak to you, I am aware that an aspirational India is emerging, an India that demands more opportunities, greater choices, better infrastructure, and enhanced safety and security. Our youth, our greatest national asset, are a confident and courageous lot. I have no doubt that their passion, energy and enterprise will take India to new heights.

Amidst these aspirations, we are also burdened by gathering anxieties about economic slowdown, job security and employment prospects. People are concerned about the security of our women and children. They are also anxious about timely delivery of their entitlements and about persisting social and economic inequality.

The past year has been a very difficult one for the global economy. Europe is in recession. Most emerging markets are growing very slowly. It has been a difficult year for India also. Both global and domestic factors have affected our growth. We need to address the impact of both. My Government has responded to the situation by taking several measures to revive investment activity and investor sentiment.

An important initiative that my Government has taken recently is the rollout of the Direct Benefits Transfer system. This would enable Government sponsored benefits such as scholarships, pensions and maternity benefits to flow directly into the accounts of beneficiaries, who can access them using their Aadhaar number. In due course, the Direct Benefits Transfer System will also cover wages and subsidies on food and LPG. This system will help

cut down leakages, bring millions of people into the financial system and lead to better targeting of beneficiaries. It will be a trend-setter in the use of modern technology to bring benefits to our poorest citizens, especially in rural areas. However, the Direct Benefits Transfer System will not be a substitute for public services and will be complementary to the Public Distribution System.

The average annual growth rate of GDP in the 11th Plan, which concluded last year, was 8 per cent. A notable feature of the Plan was the progress towards achieving inclusiveness with a faster decline in poverty than in the previous decade. The National Development Council has recently adopted the 12th Five Year Plan, which further sharpens the focus on faster, more inclusive and sustainable growth. The 12th Plan recognises that growth outcomes will depend upon the extent to which we are able to take some difficult decisions. The Plan proposes to consolidate Centrally Sponsored Schemes into a smaller number and increase their flexibility. This will give States the much-needed freedom to experiment and innovate.

The Indian economy is currently experiencing slower growth. Real GDP grew by 5.4 per cent in the first half of the current fiscal year. This is significantly lower than the average of around 8 per cent in the last decade. Our slower growth is the consequence of a combination of global and domestic factors. My Government is taking steps to deal with the factors responsible for the slowdown. Inflation is easing gradually but is still a problem.

In recent months, there have been positive developments too. There has been a moderation in core inflation and recovery in growth is likely. Policy measures announced during the year have also restored optimism at home and abroad.

My Government has announced a roadmap for fiscal consolidation by containing the current year's fiscal deficit at 5.3 per cent of the GDP. The Government is also working with State Governments to reach a consensus on the Goods and Services Tax.

There is reason for cheer on the agricultural front. The growth in agriculture and allied sectors during the 11th Plan was 3.7 per cent compared to 2.4 per cent in the 10th Plan.

I am proud to mention that relentless efforts of farmers coupled with conducive policies of the Government, have resulted in record foodgrain production for two consecutive years with last year achieving a peak of 260 million tons. This year, despite erratic and deficient rainfall, it is projected that we will produce more than 250 million tons of foodgrains.

Our foodgrains position is, therefore, comfortable. The total stock of foodgrains with the public sector agencies was 662 lakh tons on

1st February 2013, including 307 lakh tons of wheat and over 353 lakh tons of rice. My Government is committed to enacting the National Food Security Bill, having received the recommendations of the Standing Committee.

Several specific initiatives have been undertaken under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna. Sugarcane and cotton production have touched record levels in 2011-12.

My Government will continue to lay emphasis on the development of rainfed and degraded areas during the 12th Five Year Plan. An outlay of ₹ 29,296 crore has been earmarked under the Integrated Watershed Management Programme during the Plan period.

Horticulture production reached an all-time high of 251 million tons during 2011-12. The year 2012-13 has been declared as the 'Year of Horticulture'. A National Centre for Cold Chain Development has been constituted to give a fillip to the cold chain sector.

With 128 million tons of milk production in 2011-12, India continues to be the largest producer of milk in the world. In order to meet the rapidly growing demand for milk, the Government has approved the National Dairy Plan Phase-I, which will help meet the projected national demand of 150 million tons of milk by 2016-17.

To give a further boost to food processing, my Government has launched the National Mission on Food Processing. Construction of godowns is being promoted under Public Private Partnership mode. Storage capacity of about 181 lakh tons will be created over the next two years across the country with additional storage space of 5.4 lakh tons in the North-East.

The recently approved New Investment Policy for urea is expected to create nearly 100 lakh MT of additional production capacity in urea by 2017, making the country self-reliant in urea.

Around 34 lakh hectares of irrigation potential was created under the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme during the 11th Plan. During the 12th Plan, an additional 87 lakh hectares of irrigation potential is planned to be created under the Programme. The New National Water Policy adopted recently by the National Water Resources Council emphasizes efficient use of water and the need to align planning for water resources with the challenges of climate change, equity, social justice and sustainability.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme continues to break new ground in my Government's effort to provide work to those who seek employment during times of hardship. Around 5 crore households were provided employment under the scheme in 2011-12.

In order to make available improved housing for the rural poor, the Government has substantially enhanced the assistance under Indira Awas Yojana by increasing it from ₹ 45,000 to ₹ 70,000 per unit in plain areas

and from ₹ 48,500 to ₹ 75,000 per unit in hilly and difficult areas including Left Wing Extremism affected areas.

My Government has recently introduced important official amendments to the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill. I am confident that the law will be enacted.

The next phase of the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission is being finalized. Meanwhile, the tenure of the current Mission has been extended until March 2014 for completion of ongoing projects and for sanction of new projects so as to maintain the momentum of development of urban infrastructure. In order to give a push to capacity building efforts of Urban Local Bodies, the Government has decided to create a separate fund of ₹ 1,000 crore.

My Government proposes to extend the Rajiv Awas Yojana to all small and medium towns, with a target of one million houses in the 12th Plan.

My Government is giving priority to addressing the problem of contamination of sources of drinking water. During 2012-13, 5 per cent of the National Rural Drinking Water Programme Fund has been earmarked for allocation to States facing this problem. A Rural Water Supply & Sanitation Project for Low Income States, estimated at nearly ₹ 5,000 crore, is being developed with the help of the World Bank to assist States that are lagging behind in the coverage of piped water supply.

Recognising its crucial role in reducing the burden of disease, my Government has accorded increased priority to rural sanitation. The Total Sanitation Campaign has been modified in the form of the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan with the goal of providing access to sanitation for all rural households by the year 2022.

My Government has recently increased the pension for widows and disabled beneficiaries under the Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme and Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme from ₹ 200 to ₹ 300 per month. On attaining the age of 80 years, beneficiaries of both the schemes now migrate to Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme where they get a pension of ₹ 500 per month.

With a view to recognizing the contribution of street vendors and ensuring uniformity in the legal framework for street vending across States, the "Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Bill, 2012" has been introduced in Parliament.

Under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, more than 32 lakh claims have been filed and nearly 13 lakh titles have been distributed.

To ensure the educational empowerment of minority communities, my Government is implementing three scholarship schemes, with 30 per cent of the funds in each scheme earmarked for girl students. An amount of over ₹ 880 crore has been disbursed as scholarships to more than 55 lakh students till 31 December in 2012-13. To encourage students belonging to minority communities to take up higher studies, an amount of ₹ 66 crore has been released under the Maulana Azad National Fellowship Scheme. The Wakf Act is being amended and Wakf Development Corporation will be set up for development and protection of Wakf properties.

Under Prime Minister's New 15-Point Programme, the effort is to ensure that 15 per cent of the targets and outlays of the identified schemes benefit the minority communities. For financial inclusion, the flow of priority sector credit to minorities at the national level during 2012-13 reached ₹ 1,71,960 crore as on 30.9.2012, which was more than 15 per cent of the total priority sector lending.

As promised by my predecessor last year, a new Bill for the elimination of manual scavenging and rehabilitation of manual scavengers was introduced in the Lok Sabha in September 2012.

A centrally sponsored scholarship scheme has been introduced for Scheduled Caste students studying in classes IX and X. It is expected to benefit about 40 lakh students.

My Government has created a separate Department of Disability Affairs. The Government recently launched the Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship for students with disabilities to enable them to pursue higher education.

For holistic development of children, the Government has approved the restructuring and strengthening of the Integrated Child Development Scheme during the 12th Plan with a total outlay of ₹ 1,23,580 crore.

My Government has enacted a path-breaking legislation, the 'Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act', which provides for stringent punishment for persons who commit or abet such offences.

For ensuring a safe and secure environment for women in work places, the Government introduced the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2012 in Parliament. The Bill has been passed by the Lok Sabha. My Government is also deeply concerned about incidents of sexual offences against women. After considering the recommendations of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee, the Government has promulgated an ordinance, amending the criminal law to provide for stringent punishment for heinous sexual offences against women. The Government has also begun to implement a series of administrative measures to improve the safety and security of women in the country.

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women will implement a pilot project in public hospitals in 100 districts, called "One Stop Crisis Centre", a specialized facility for providing all necessary services for women subjected to violence.

The Mid-day Meal Programme today covers around 11 crore children in over 12 lakh schools. Several new initiatives have been taken by the Government to make it more effective. My Government is committed to expanding coverage under this programme to pre-primary schools in a progressive manner.

My Government is considering a strategic shift in central funding to States for higher education through a new programme called the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan. This programme will encourage States to develop comprehensive higher education plans in an integrated manner to address the issues of expansion, equity and excellence.

My Government has taken major strides in accelerating our skill development efforts. The number of ITIs that stood at 5114 in 2006-07, more than doubled to 10344 by the end of 2012.

In January 2013, we completed two years without detection of even a single case of wild polio-virus. This is the longest polio-free period in the country ever since eradication efforts were launched.

In health infrastructure, over 43,500 new construction and upgradation works of health facilities were taken up in the period 2005-06 to 2012-13 and nearly 70,000 additional beds have been added in Government health institutions. During the same period, around 1.45 lakh medicare staff has been added in various States under the National Rural Health Mission.

To overcome the shortage of nursing staff, Government has sanctioned over 200 nursing schools in remote and under-served districts in the last two years. To increase the availability of doctors and specialists, several reforms were initiated, resulting in a record increase of 46 per cent MBBS seats and 70 per cent Post-Graduate seats in the last five years. An overarching National Health Mission, covering both rural and urban areas, is being finalized.

Over 1.1 crore women benefited from the Janani Suraksha Yojana during 2011-12. Under the Janani Sishu Suraksha Karyakram, pregnant women are entitled to absolutely free care in public health institutions.

To further improve child health, my Government has launched the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram for screening of children below 18 years for 30 different types of diseases, disorders, deficiencies and disabilities. This national initiative will eventually cover around 270 million children across the country.

Due to efforts of the Government, there have been significant reductions in Maternal Mortality Rate, Infant Mortality Rate and Total Fertility Rate in recent years. Life expectancy at birth has increased from 61.9 years in the period 1996-2000 to 66.1 years in the period 2006-2010.

The National AIDS Control Programme has been recognized globally as a success story. The programme has reduced annual new HIV infections by 57 per cent in the last decade. Adult HIV prevalence has decreased from 0.40 per cent in 2000 to 0.27 per cent in 2011.

Since the launch of the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana, more than 3.35 crore smart cards have been issued and more than 43.26 lakh persons have availed hospitalization facility under the scheme. This insurance scheme has been extended to building and other construction workers, street vendors, beedi workers and other categories.

Lack of adequate and quality infrastructure is a major hurdle in the fast growth of our economy. Therefore, it is imperative that the infrastructure deficit is overcome and adequate investment takes place. Government has taken two major steps to ensure that impediments in this area are eliminated.

The first is setting up of the Cabinet Committee on Investment to expedite decisions on approvals and clearances for implementation of projects. The second is the creation of Infrastructure Debt Funds to raise low-cost, long-term resources for refinancing infrastructure projects.

My Government remains committed to increasing the share of manufacturing to 25 per cent of GDP and creating 100 million jobs within a decade. Under the National Manufacturing Policy, 12 National Investment & Manufacturing Zones stand notified, 8 of them along the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor and 4 others at Nagpur, Tumkur, Chittor and Medak. The Government has also liberalized the FDI policy in single-brand and multi-brand retail trading, air transport services, power exchanges and the broadcasting sector. The E-Biz project has been launched to serve as a 24x7 online single window system for providing services to investors and businesses.

The National Electric Mobility Mission Plan-2020 has been prepared. It envisages a roadmap for facilitating manufacture of electric and hybrid vehicles that are environment friendly and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

My Government has notified the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Policy-2012 to ensure availability of essential medicines at affordable prices even while providing sufficient opportunity for innovation and competition to support the growth of the industry. Six new National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education & Research at Hyderabad, Gandhinagar, Hajipur, Kolkata, Guwahati and Raebareli have started functioning.

My Government has taken effective measures to incentivize exports and provide support to labour intensive sectors. India became the largest exporter of rice in 2012-13.

With a view to providing further support to handloom weavers, the Government is considering a scheme for concessional credit for the handloom sector to benefit about 10 lakh handloom weavers.

To promote Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises, 20 per cent of all Government procurement is required to be from Micro & Small Enterprises. The Bombay Stock Exchange and the National Stock Exchange launched Small and Medium Enterprises exchange platforms in 2012, making access to capital markets easier.

As a major step forward in reforming our banking sector, the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2012 was passed by both the Houses of Parliament in December, 2012. The Government amended the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 for more effective prevention of money laundering.

Pursuing the Budget announcement of 2012-13, Government has notified the Rajiv Gandhi Equity Savings Scheme for first-time retail investors. Through the disinvestment policy, we have broad-based people's ownership of Government enterprises.

The tourism sector contributes substantially to the country's foreign exchange earnings, which during 2012 were estimated at ₹ 94,487 crore, a growth of over 21 per cent over the previous year. Foreign tourist arrivals in India in 2012 were estimated at 6.65 million.

India is the ninth largest civil aviation market in the world. Kolkata and Chennai Airports now have new terminals. My Government has given 'in-principle' approval for setting up a greenfield airport at Aranmula in Kerala, apart from airports at Navi Mumbai, Mopa and Kannur.

The Dedicated Freight Corridor project is an ambitious mega project connecting our Eastern and Western Coasts with the interiors of the country and will cover 3300 km of railway track. Construction of over 1000 km route length is expected to begin shortly.

A state of the art Coach Production Facility at Raebareli has been commissioned for producing modern stainless steel coaches. Innovative approaches under the PPP mode are being launched for first-and-last-mile projects and development of railway stations. Construction of the Banihal-Qazigund tunnel in Jammu and Kashmir has been completed and work on starting train services is in progress.

In 2012-13, 2600 km of roads are expected to be constructed and contracts for 3000 km of new roads are expected to be awarded. A new approach to road construction, the EPC mode, has been put in place. This

will ensure significant cost and time savings compared to traditional contracting methods. A length of 2900 km of highways will be put under the Operate, Maintain and Transfer system, which will improve road maintenance. To improve connectivity from Kashmir Valley to Kargil-Ladakh region, a tunnel of 6.5 km has already been approved and another tunnel of 13 km is planned. This would ensure all weather connectivity.

In 2012-13, 42 PPP port projects have been targeted for award, involving an additional capacity of 251 Million Tonnes Per Annum with an investment of ₹ 14,770 crore in 2012-13. The Government proposes to establish two new major ports, one at Sagar Island in West Bengal and the other in Andhra Pradesh with a total additional capacity of around 100 Million Tonnes Per Annum.

A number of steps such as technology development & modernization and development of new coal blocks by engaging Mine Developer and Operator have been taken to improve the productivity of Coal India Limited (CIL). After resolving pending issues, 46 Fuel Supply Agreements were signed by CIL with power utilities. Following the notification of the new Auction by Competitive Bidding Rules, my Government is in the process of allocation of 17 coal blocks to Government companies, as a first step.

My Government has taken important steps to harness our mineral resources. Geological Survey of India has planned to complete the geophysical and geochemical mapping of highly promising 5.71 lakh square km. area during the 12th Plan. For developing deep sea mineral exploration capability, an Ocean Going Research Vessel is likely to be commissioned in 2013.

In the 11th Plan, 54,964 MW of electricity generation capacity has been added which is about two & half times the capacity added during the 10th Plan. The total installed capacity stood at about 2 lakh MW at the end of the 11th Plan. To meet the projected demand by the end of the 12th Plan, the targeted capacity addition in the Plan is 88,537 MW.

Under Rajiv Gandhi Gramin Vidyutikaran Yojana, more than one lakh un-electrified villages have been electrified. Nearly 2,85,000 villages have been intensively electrified and free electricity connections given to more than 2 crore BPL households.

A scheme for financial restructuring of State owned distribution companies has been notified by the Government of India to enable their turnaround and long-term viability. This would help settle loans worth more than ₹ 1.85 lakh crore that the power utilities owe to financial institutions.

Through suitable policy interventions, my Government is targeting significant reduction of our dependence on imported oil and gas which is presently more than 75 per cent of our requirement.

Renewable energy has to play an expanding role in achieving energy security in the years ahead. The country has an installed capacity of over 26,400 MW from various renewable energy sources, which is over 12 per cent of the country's total power generation capacity.

My Government's reform measures and proactive policies, as well as active participation by the private sector have resulted in an unprecedented growth of the telecom sector. With more than 935 million telephone connections, the Indian telecom network is the second largest in the world. Tele-density was 76.75 per cent in October, 2012 with rural tele-density crossing 40 per cent. The Government approved the National Telecom Policy-2012 which lays down the vision and strategic direction for the telecom sector. Two and a half lakh Gram Panchayats will be connected with broadband facility under the National Optical Fibre Network project by December 2014.

The Department of Posts is rolling out a rural ICT programme, through which all post offices will be connected electronically. Computers will be provided to 1,30,000 post offices, which would facilitate both postal and banking services at post offices.

In 2011-12, the Indian IT and IT Enabled Services industry showed remarkable resilience by earning revenue of US$101 billion. The total employment in IT Software and Services touched 2.8 million in 2011-12, with an annual growth of about 9 per cent.

My Government has approved the National Electronics Policy, 2012, covering a comprehensive set of schemes with special focus on promoting domestic Electronics System Design and Manufacturing. The National Policy on Information Technology has been approved. It envisions strengthening and enhancing India's position as a global hub for IT and using IT as an engine for rapid, inclusive and sustainable growth. About 1,00,000 Citizen Service Centres are delivering IT services to the people.

The Government has successfully completed the first phase of Cable TV digitization in three metro cities. This will be extended to other cities in a phased manner.

We are commemorating 100 years of Indian cinema. The first phase of the National Museum of Indian Cinema is proposed to be dedicated to the nation at Gulshan Mahal, Mumbai.

During 2012, Government commemorated the 150th Birth Anniversaries of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Shri Madan Mohan Malaviya and Shri Motilal Nehru apart from undertaking preparatory work for observing the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda and the Centenary of the Gadar movement. A new International Award, namely the "Tagore Award for Cultural

Harmony", has been instituted. The first award will be given posthumously to late Pandit Ravi Shankar. A National Mission for Libraries commenced its work in 2012.

The Archaeological Survey of India celebrated 150 years of existence in 2012 and took up important initiatives in Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos for restoration of temples there.

The performance of our athletes at the London Olympics and the Paralympics was encouraging. My Government has decided to put in place a long-term plan for training of sports-persons in select disciplines. My Government also intends to put in place a new system for identification of sports talent from the panchayat to the district level.

The Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development in Tamil Nadu has been accorded the status of an institute of national importance.

Some parts of our country have in the recent past witnessed communal incidents. My Government is determined to thwart any attempt at disturbing our communal peace and harmony.

In July 2012, incidents of violence took place in some districts of Assam, in which about hundred persons were killed. In order to control the violence, adequate army and paramilitary forces were deployed. The State Government set up relief camps and provided basic amenities to the affected people. The Central Government announced a package of ₹ 300 crore for relief and rehabilitation efforts.

Incidents of Left Wing extremist violence have shown a declining trend. The number of deaths in naxal violence declined from 611 in 2011 to 414 in 2012.

My Government is committed to dealing with Left Wing Extremism in a comprehensive manner. It is pursuing a two-pronged approach of conducting proactive and sustained operations against extremists and focussing attention on development and governance issues in extremist affected areas. A new scheme for construction and strengthening of 400 police stations has been started in the affected areas. The first phase of the plan for improving road connectivity in 34 most affected districts at a cost of ₹ 7,300 crore is likely to be completed by March, 2015.

The security situation in Jammu and Kashmir and the North East has shown a perceptible improvement. The number of tourists visiting Jammu and Kashmir has increased from 8.99 lakh in 2011 to 12.37 lakh in 2012. Compared with 2011, the number of fatalities in incidents of terrorist violence in 2012 declined by nearly half. Under the placement linked scheme named Udaan, proposals of corporate houses to train nearly 25,000 youth from Jammu and Kashmir have already been approved. Under another

placement linked skill development initiative called *Himayat*, more than 1650 youth from the state have been trained, of which over 650 have been employed.

My Government has accorded high priority to Border Management. In addition to the work of border fencing, roads and floodlighting along the borders with Bangladesh, Pakistan and Myanmar, Government has decided to undertake the construction of 509 additional border outposts along the Indo-Bangladesh and Indo-Pakistan border. The Integrated Check Post at Attari was operationalised in April, 2012.

In pursuance of the tri-partite agreement, an autonomous body called the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) has been formed in August, 2012 for the Darjeeling Hill Areas. My Government will provide the GTA financial assistance of ₹ 200 crore per annum for 3 years for development of socio-economic infrastructure. This will be over and above the normal plan assistance to the State of West Bengal.

My Government remains committed to ushering in reforms for greater transparency, probity, integrity and accountability in governance. To this end, my Government attaches priority to the enactment of legislation proposed in the Whistle Blowers' Protection Bill, the Prevention of Bribery of Foreign Public Officials and Officials of Public International Organizations Bill, Citizens' Right to Grievance Redress Bill, and the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill, which already stand introduced in the Parliament. My Government is also considering amendments to the Prevention of Corruption Act to punish the guilty and protect the honest public servants more effectively.

My Government has taken significant initiatives including enhanced funding of ₹ 4867 crore in the 12th Plan to strengthen the legal and judicial infrastructure in the country. Over 14,000 District and Subordinate Courts are being equipped with the tools of information and communication to provide quality citizen-centric services to litigants. As one of its foremost priorities, Government will endeavour to establish Gram Nyayalayas for ensuring affordable and expeditious justice to the common man. My Government proposes to introduce the Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill in this session as a significant initiative towards judicial reforms.

The people of India are grateful to our Armed Forces for their exemplary professionalism, commitment and bravery in defending our nation. The country is united in paying tribute to our soldiers who have made the supreme sacrifice by laying down their lives for the country.

Our Armed Forces are fully prepared to defend the country against any threat. My Government will continue to take all necessary steps to modernize and equip our Armed Forces; bolster defence infrastructure, especially in the border areas; encourage indigenous defence R&D; and expand domestic

production of defence equipment. The continuing progress in our missile programme has strengthened our deterrence capability. Coastal security has also been further strengthened.

My Government attaches the highest importance to the welfare of servicemen and ex-servicemen. Significant steps have been taken to enhance the pay and pension of serving and retired Services personnel and to remove disparities. This will benefit over 13 lakh personnel.

My Government's foreign policy continues to be driven by the objectives of creating an enabling environment for our national development, ensuring the security of the nation and fulfilling our international responsibilities.

We continue to seek peace, stability, cooperation and economic development in the sub-continent. We attach the highest priority to relations with our immediate neighbours. With Pakistan, we have made progress towards normalization of relations, strengthening mechanisms for bilateral trade and facilitating greater people-to-people contact. While we remain committed to taking the process forward, it is also important that Pakistan abides by its commitments and desists from acts that contribute to a trust deficit. As Afghanistan prepares for the political and security transition in 2014 and beyond, we will continue to help Afghanistan evolve peacefully and fight terrorism and extremism.

My Government proposes to introduce a Constitutional Amendment Bill in Parliament to give effect to the provisions of the Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh and its 2011 protocol, which will strengthen border management and our security.

We are making progress in our engagement with Sri Lanka, including in our efforts to resettle and rehabilitate the internally displaced persons there and to ensure a life of peace, dignity and equality for the Tamil people.

In West Asia and North Africa, my Government supports efforts to promote peaceful settlement of conflicts and resolution of disputes in a manner that accommodates the democratic aspirations of the people. We are also mindful of the fact that the Gulf region is home to nearly six million Indians who live and work there and that we depend on the region for the bulk of our energy requirements. We have further enhanced our political engagement with and economic assistance to countries of Africa.

At the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi in December 2012, which marked the tenth anniversary of the annual ASEAN-India Summits, we elevated our relations with ASEAN to a strategic partnership and concluded negotiations on an ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement on services and investment.

My Government intends to work with the new Chinese leadership to reinforce the positive direction of our relationship. Our multi-faceted relationship with Japan, which is also a major partner in our infrastructure development efforts, is making good progress. The privileged and strategic partnership we have built with Russia received a further boost during the visit of President Valdimir Putin in December 2012.

The Strategic Partnership with the United States has deepened, with progress across all areas of our relationship and we look forward to intensifying this engagement during the second term of President Obama. India's traditionally strong relations with Europe will continue to develop. The visit of President Francois Hollande to Delhi in February 2013, his first Asian destination as President, will further strengthen our friendship and broad-based strategic cooperation with France.

As a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council during the last two years, India played an important role in the Council's efforts to promote international peace and security. We intensified efforts to generate momentum for early reform of the United Nations Security Council. We are also seeking concerted international action against piracy. In addition, a Piracy Bill was introduced in the Parliament last year for prosecution in India of persons committing piracy.

India also remained constructively engaged in global multilateral diplomacy. We hosted the fourth BRICS Summit in New Delhi in March 2012 and the ministerial meet of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation in October 2012.

As our development partnership expands and assumes an increasingly vital role in our foreign policy, my Government has established a Development Partnership Administration in the Ministry of External Affairs for more efficient and effective administration of our wide-ranging assistance programme, which covers financial aid, capacity building and training and the sharing of our development experience and expertise.

My Government has successfully completed the implementation of the Passport Seva Project, one of the mission-mode projects under the National e-Governance Plan, to deliver passport related services to our citizens in a timely, convenient and transparent manner.

My Government is deeply committed to promoting the interests and welfare of overseas Indians. The Government launched the Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Suraksha Yojana on a pilot basis in May 2012 to provide emigrant Indian workers benefits like life insurance cover, pensions and Return and Resettlement savings. We also signed Social Security Agreements with Finland, Canada, Japan and Sweden. Similar agreements with Austria and Portugal will be signed soon.

Our space programme epitomizes India's scientific achievements and benefits the country in a number of areas. The launch of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle on 9 September 2012 marked our 100th space mission. India's first remote sensing satellite RISAT-1, with all-weather imaging capability, was also launched in 2012. Several space missions are planned for 2013, including India's first mission to Mars and the launch of our first navigational satellite.

The country continues to make progress in the field of nuclear energy. Electricity generation from nuclear power plants increased by about 23 per cent in 2011-12 over the previous year. This year, two units of the nuclear power plant at Kudankulam, established with Russian collaboration, will be commissioned. My Government attaches the highest priority to the safety of nuclear power plants. A Bill to set up a Nuclear Safety Regulatory Authority has been introduced in Parliament. We have also conducted internal technical reviews of all safety systems of nuclear power plants in the country. In addition, we are working with the International Atomic Energy Agency on all nuclear safety issues.

The Government has unveiled the Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2013 to accelerate the pace of discovery, diffusion and delivery of science-led solutions for faster, sustainable and inclusive growth. In order to popularize science education in schools, nearly 7.30 lakh scholarships have been awarded under a scheme called Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research. About 48 per cent of the awardees are girls and 25 per cent belong to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. A new PPP doctoral fellowship titled "Prime Minister's Fellowship Scheme for Doctoral Research" has been implemented this year.

The Government is setting up a dedicated Seismological Research Laboratory and has launched a first-of-its-kind research programme in the earthquake-prone Koyna-Warna region of Maharashtra to study precursor changes. The Indian tsunami early warning system was recognized as the Regional Tsunami Service Provider for the Indian Ocean region in October 2012. India's third permanent station in Antarctica was commissioned in March 2012.

India successfully hosted the eleventh Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Hyderabad in October, 2012. The event provided India with an opportunity to consolidate, scale-up and showcase its strengths in the field of biodiversity. One of the most important outcomes of this Conference was the commitment made by the Parties to double the total biodiversity-related international financial resource flows to developing countries by 2015. At the Conference, the Prime Minister launched the 'Hyderabad Pledge', wherein he announced earmarking US $50 million during India's presidency of the Conference of Parties to strengthen the institutional, technical and human capabilities for biodiversity conservation in India, and to promote similar capacity building in other developing countries.

At the recently held Doha Conference on Climate Change, India played a lead role in ensuring that the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibility continue to be recognized as the basis of the Parties' efforts under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

India stands tall as a nation because we are seen as a liberal and plural democracy, which has faced and overcome tremendous odds. The world recognizes India's demonstrable democratic and secular practices as a major achievement. While we should rejoice in the benefits that our plurality brings, the challenge is to relentlessly pursue our efforts to accelerate economic growth and widen opportunities within our democratic framework. It is only if we constantly renew and defend the democratic values that define our nationhood that we will be able to face the great challenges that lie before us. On behalf of my Government, I appeal to all of you to support our endeavours in marching ahead as a proud nation.

Jai Hind.